UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/CN.3/1991/L.4/Add.15
11 February 1991

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

STATISTICAL COMMISSION
Twenty-sixth session
4-13 February 1991
Agenda item 15

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON ITS TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: J. A. MWANIKI (Kenya)

Chapter ___. DEMOGRAPHIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS

Population and housing censuses

1. The Commission considered item 9 (a) of its agenda at its 442nd and 443rd meetings, on 7 February 1991. It had before it the report of the Secretary-General on the general development and integration of methodological work, including experience and progress made in international classifications (E/CN.3/1991/24, sect. II.D) and the report of the Secretary-General containing updated information on the work of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat (E/CN.3/1991/30, sect. V and annex II).

2. The Commission welcomed the progress report on the 1990 World Population and Housing Census Programme and expressed appreciation for the ongoing national, regional and global efforts to implement the Programme. In that regard, members expressed their appreciation for the substantive support and role of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and indicated that they would continue to need that support in the future in various areas, including, for example, census planning, census cartography, data processing and dissemination, census evaluation, analysis and utilization of census results and inter-censal surveys.

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3. The Commission welcomed the publication of the Supplementary Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, the Use of Microcomputers for Census Data Processing and the Manual on Population Census Data Processing Using Microcomputers, which were designed to assist countries in census preparation and in the timely processing and dissemination of census data. It was pleased to learn of the preparation by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat of a revised series of population and housing census handbooks drawn from the experience of many countries' national census administrative reports, census questionnaires, enumerator manuals and other census reports, as well as from technical co-operation experience and other sources.

4. The Commission noted the increasing application of microcomputers in census work. In addition to data processing, there was growing interest in the development and use of census data bases to make tabulations readily available, as required, for investigating new phenomena and the use of desk-top publishing facilities to avoid delays and help build in-service capability to effectively disseminate census results. However, the Commission cautioned that the confidentiality of individuals must be protected when micro-records are disseminated, for example, through records that have been made anonymous.

5. The Commission stressed the importance of the use of census results by various government departments and research organizations, including secondary analysis and promotion of the usefulness of data among the public. It was suggested that a basic programme designed to promote the use of census data in national census programmes should include the preparation of general audience popular reports on selected census topics, census monographs, census life tables and population projections, in addition to the traditional publications and machine-readable census products.

6. During the discussion, the question of the use of population registers as an alternative to a population census was raised. However, the Commission considered that, for most countries, population and housing censuses constituted one of the cornerstones of the national statistical system, since relatively few countries have the technical and legal instruments to allow population registers and other administrative sources to be applied to collect the same amount of information as population and housing censuses.

7. With respect to methodological studies, the importance of undertaking a study of the cost of population and housing censuses at the regional level was mentioned. Based on the previous experience of the Secretariat, such studies were found to be complex and the results could be easily misinterpreted. This was due to the great variation among countries in the way censuses were carried out in terms of the use of personnel and other resources of national, provincial and local government departments, as well as volunteer enumerators and contributions from the private sector. Consequently, the total cost was difficult to obtain on a comparable basis across countries.

8. Members pointed out the significant and positive impact of technical co-operation activities with financial support, particularly from UNFPA, in enhancing national efforts to carry out population and housing censuses. The

important role of the assistance provided by the United Nations regional commissions was also stressed.

9. Finally, the Commission noted that many of the issues discussed under the sub-item also related to issues discussed under agenda item 11, "Technical co-operation".

Action taken by the Commission

10. The Commission:

(a) Expressed its satisfaction with the work carried out by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, the regional commissions and other bodies in connection with the 1990 World Population and Housing Census Programme, expressed its appreciation to the multilateral and bilateral donors, particularly UNFPA, for their considerable support to the success of the Programme, and stressed the need for continued support;

(b) Emphasized the importance of census methodological studies, including handbooks, guides and manuals, and requested their timely publication and wide distribution to countries;

(c) Recommended the effective dissemination and utilization of census data at national, regional and community levels and their analysis oriented towards policies and programmes with special reference to women and special population groups such as children, the elderly and the disabled;

(d) Recommended that future work in the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat give increased emphasis to housing censuses and related issues;

(e) Requested the Secretary-General to report to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-seventh session on the progress of the 1990 World Population and Housing Census Programme and preparations for the next world programme.